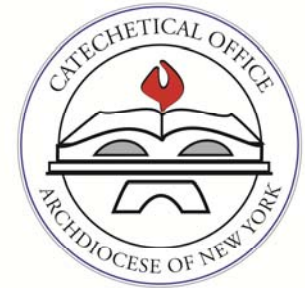
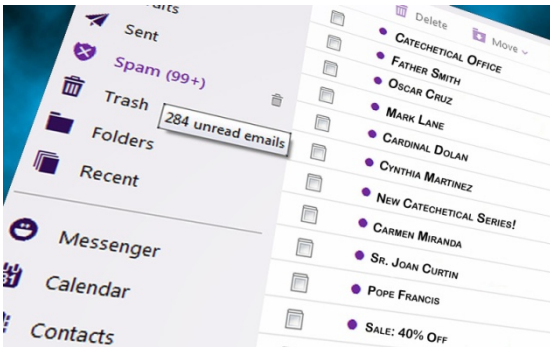


Using Email: Considerations for the Catechetical Leader



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Communicating by email is a daily part of the work of a catechetical leader. Writing and responding to emails is an important way to communicate to your people. As professional ministers, we need to consider how we use email in the context of our ministry. What are some issues that you need to be aware of as you use email in your ministry? Here are some points for you to consider.

1. **Professional Look.** Every catechetical leader needs a professional email address, which means an address that has a professional look and feel. When the recipient receives an email from this address, there is an awareness that it is from you as catechetical leader. Thus, emails such as momlovesyou@aol.com or sexysenior@yahoo.com should be avoided. Your formal name or a variant of it is always appropriate. For example, linda.jones@outlook.com or jamessmith2@aol.com. The title of your ministry would also be a good choice, for example, rcia@stpatrick.org, REdirector@stmary.com. Remember to make it easy to remember and type.
2. **Ministry only Email.** In addition to a professional address, always use an email address specifically for your ministry work. Using a personal email address for ministry confuses the personal and professional. As a leader, proper boundaries are called for. Having a ministry email is less confusing when replying to emails because you are using this email address *only* as a catechetical leader and using it *only* to conduct parish business.
3. **Consider the Who.** Before writing an email, consider the person you are emailing. Ask yourself if you should respond in another way. Would this person be more comfortable with a phone call or meeting, rather than an email response? If you know the person, consider whether bullet points might be better than a paragraph, or a more direct response than over-explaining. Always remember that you are responding to a *person*. Don't forget the Golden Rule!
4. **Count to Ten.** Consider your emotional state when you respond to email. Think *before* you send – once sent, the email cannot be taken back. If an email irks you, or you are feeling weary, disrespected or angry, you'll want to give yourself some time before responding.

Consider writing a draft and let it sit for a day. You may decide not to respond at all. Your emotional reaction could damage a relationship that may be difficult or impossible to repair.

5. **Get to the Point.** When writing emails, try to be as clear and concise as possible. Emails should never be long and rambling. Put essential information first. Remember that the recipient only reads the words, so they can't see your body language, voice inflection, or gestures. Humor, irony and sarcasm are easily misinterpreted. Your manner should be friendly, but business like.
6. **Communicate Absences.** Be efficient and respond to emails within 24 hours. If you do not have time to sufficiently attend to an email, then let the person know when you will be able to respond. If you are not in the office either temporarily or on a regular basis use an out of office reply so that people understand your availability. For example, "I am only in the office on Saturdays, I will get back to you then" or "The religious education program is on vacation this week, I will be back on Tuesday" or "If you need immediate assistance, please call...". This is a courtesy to people who need to contact you and are awaiting your reply.
7. **Spelling Counts.** Always use good grammar and spelling. This is not only professional but a sign of respect. Use the spell check, but realize that it is not always accurate. A sloppy email shows that the recipient isn't worthy of your time.
8. **Forwarding and Reply to All.** Use forwards selectively. Just because you receive a cartoon, story, joke or prayer request that you think is terrific doesn't necessarily mean that you should send it out to everyone. As a rule, forwards should be avoided. However, if it is something of value, consider *who* would best be served by the forward and send selectively. Also, consider your use of "reply to all" and whether everyone needs to be copied on the reply.
9. **Plan Regular Emails and Protect Privacy.** Consider how you regularly email groups of people. Avoid a helter-skelter approach. Planning a weekly emailing to catechists, or other groups of people, is more effective than emailing them several times a week. Protect the privacy of the people who gave you their email address by using Bcc (blind carbon copy) when emailing groups. Bcc prevents the recipients from seeing the email addresses of those who received the same email.
10. **Email is Forever.** You'll never want to write something or respond in a way that diminishes your integrity, your ministry or other people. Even when you delete email, it remains archived by your email provider. And it is so easily shared. Beware! Your email may take on a life of its own!